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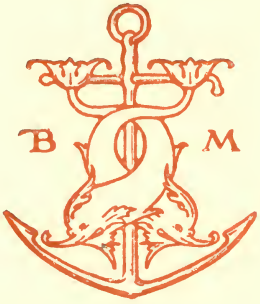
TO-MORROW'S ROAD

TO-MORROW'S ROAD AND LATER POEMS

BY GERTRUDE M. HORT



PORTLAND MAINE
THOMAS BIRD MOSHER
MDCCCCXVI

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1916

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TO-MORROW'S ROAD

FOREWORD

TAKING THE ROAD

I

BEYOND *the inn of Even-Chime,*
Where men unpack the day-long load,
A shadowy track begins to climb
And opens on To-morrow's Road.

II

The road that must be travelled still
To meet To-morrow's sun aright—
'T is up the hill, and up the hill,
And round the hill . . . and out of sight.

III

Nine nights in ten the journey 's blest,
For dream tells dream the shortest way,
And while we climb we think we rest,
And while we move we seem to stay.

IV

And, without thought, we can fulfil
The plan and purpose of the night,
Go up the hill, and up the hill,
And round the hill . . . and out of sight.

V

But sometimes there is mist and din,
And blind revolt of heart and mind.—
The lighted windows of the inn
Fade from us, and we meet the wind

VI

That holds us on the lower slopes
To grope and blunder uselessly,
And talk again with fears and hopes,
And lag and drag with memory!

VII

'T is then some summon to their aid,
Like cordial cup or opiate flowers,
The songs they with their comrades made
For comradeless and songless hours.

A MAN'S BARGAIN

I

IF I cry out for fellowship,
A comrade's voice, a comrade's grip,
A hand to hold me, when I slip,
An ear to heed my groan,
Renew that hour's dark ecstasy,
When all Thy waves went over me,
And Thou and I, with none to see,
Were joined in fight alone!

II

If I demand a sheltered space
Set for me in the battle-place,
Where I at times could turn my face,
A screened and welcomed guest.
Decree my soul should henceforth cease
From its wild hankering after peace,
And rest in that which gives release
From the desire of rest.

III

If I for final goal should ask,—
Some meaning for the long day's task,
Some ripened field that yet may bask,
Secure from hurricane.
Point to Thy locust-eaten sheaves,—
The burnt-out stars, the still-born leaves!
And by the Toil no hope retrieves
Nerve me to toil again.

IV

So to Thy hard propitious skies
Shall praise go up like sacrifice,
And all the will within me, rise,
Applauding at Thy word;
Thou, in the Glory jasper-walled
By no reproach of mine be galled;
And I, among my kind, be called
The man whose prayers are heard!

OUT OF BOUNDS

"Etenim illuc . . ."

I

I AM here, in the house He made, where He
brought me, a blinded thing,
By a path, like a wire of light threaded into the
Dark's great ring.
And I think that He led me well, though the
things I remember best
Are the weight of the guiding hand the bruise
from the sheltering breast.

II

So we came to the house He made, where He
left me, without farewell,
And whither He went, and why, there is nobody
here to tell,

Save the Shadow down at the gate, with its face to the hidden way,—
And the price of the Shadow's speech is — a price that I can't yet pay,

III

For I 've work in the house He made, He has given me skill and sight
To perceive that He made it well, but not wholly as well as He might!
'T is His will I should change His will, that I open the doors He barred,
That I mar what His hand has made, and make what His hand has marred.

IV

I am lord where my sires were serfs; I can see where He left them blind! —
'T is His will I should change His will, and fashion His house to my mind!
But the Shadow still cleaves to the gate — a dumb dark slave, with a sword! —
And so for its purpose there, I suppose He has passed His word.

V

Like the rest, I must tire of the work! Like
the rest, I must turn from the light!
It is mile after mile of day, and after the last
mile, night!
He will give me the rest I crave, He will see
that none vex my bed
While He crumbles the house that He made,
like rose-leaves over my head!

VI

That 's the message I hear in the dawns! and
I rise to my work, content,
And I pass where the Shadow sits, still hiding
the way He went.
And I plough where I shall not sow, and I
sow where I shall not reap,
For if that is His will for me, it is well to be
earning sleep!

VII

But at nights there 's no voice at all. . . . I
have worked to the light's last gleam,
And I sleep like a tired beast — But 't is never
of sleep that I dream,

In dreams I am up and away, I am threading
the path once more,
And the Shadow 's as far behind as He may be
far before !

VIII

I have thwarted the slave at the gate ! I have
slipped from the house He made.
'T was His will I should fight His will, and
I 'm fighting it now — by His aid. . . .
Yes ! It 's mile after mile of night, and after
the last mile, day
On the dawn-thing here in the breast, that the
Slayer himself can't slay !

THE PANTHEIST

BRUNO the Scholar in his latter years
Turned to the Church, who bade him leave his lore,
Burn his dark books, and on her lowest floor
Kneel, in the dry-eyed sorrow, worse than tears.
There, as the faithful pass to pray, he hears
Curses, that bless . . . "Now, enter, and adore!
God to His humblest room of grace restore,
And show thee, where alone His Light appears!"
But some who in the Scholar's cell had bent
And tracked with him the Godhead everywhere,
Sighed for the fears that made him penitent. . . .
"Wilt thou greet God as though the altar-stair
Were His one home?" He answered: "Be content!
Strange if these eyes should miss Him only there!"

HOPE WITH TWO FACES

I

'TIS good to look where higher worlds are gleaming
— Light after light, across the Eternal Seas,—
And say how far beyond our strife and scheming
They move — like hearts at ease!
Nor ill to think how, where those starry spaces
Can catch no echo from our darkling fight
The watchers at their lone or leaguered places
Must bless our beacon-light!

II

'T is good to say, with those whose faith is certain,
That golden years already touch the gate,
That we but need to pass To-morrow's curtain,
To find the crooked straight;
Nor ill that those blind Powers that war with Meekness
For one more day compel our souls to steer
By the great strength that comes from mortal weakness,
By courage born of fear!

III

'T is well to hold through sneer and contradiction
That Good Supreme must make for goodness still,
That all the evil here is human fiction
Or erring human will.
Well too, so long as human art discloses
Its jealous care for all man's hand has made,
That it should be with griefs as 't is with roses . . .
If they are real, they fade!

IV

'T is well with men, when higher hopes must kindle,
For riper years that still have proved the best,
When they have seen youth's irksome follies dwindle.
And know that work is rest!
Aye! Even well though wisdom Time has given,
With Time himself were doomed to slide away,
And Youth, renewed on some wide field of Heaven,
Should call to endless play.

ULTIMATUM

I

ERE Time its final will on me has sated,
And with the Over-Soul this soul is mated,
I would be one with all that I have hated!
So, for my last fight, would there come to arm me,—
The sins I blamed — because they did not charm me,—
The fears I mocked — because they could not harm me —

II

The witless dreams I would not let pursue me,
The idle hopes too idle to subdue me,
The feeble thoughts that passed and never knew me;
The sordid things that found no way to reach me,
The coward things that had no power to teach me,
The brainless things that could not even beseech me —

III

While days and nights still keep the door of Heaven,
And months and years still veil the Orbits seven,
Into those weakling hands I would be given!
So, when Time's final will on me is sated,
And, with the rest, I suffer what is fated,
I shall be strong — with strength I scorned and hated!

THE VAGRANT

I

IF my heart were asked where the true dreams rise
It could only turn to familiar skies,—
For the dreams that hang by the road are lies,
Thin-weaved, as folly and foam
But though I might envy each folded lamb
That loves its shepherd, and loves its dam,
In the thing that makes me the thing I am,
There 'd be no home for Home.

II

When the stars have shone on my chance-filled cup,
I have shrunk to think where I next might sup,
And the calmest sky has shown, hoarded up,
The scourge of the morrow's rain!
But when in the open I 've faced the gust,
And my comrades felled me and snatched my crust,
The thing that rolled in the blood-stained dust,
Has felt no pain in pain.

III

I have bound my sleeve with no knightly cord,
I can judge no quarrel and wear no sword.
In the kindly shade of an inn's sign-board
I would end, full oft, day's quest.
But while one blind soul to the darkness reels,
Or one wild life, caught in the iron, squeals,
The thing that bites at my spirit's heels
Can find no rest in rest.

IV

And whate'er it is that my true will knows
It will know it still, when my last cock crows,
When into the gulf where no footing shows
My path drops, straight and sheer.
And I 'll hear It call, by the darkened brim,
(As I hear It now, when the road looks grim!)
"Come! Into the feared thing! Sink or swim!
There 's no fear left in Fear!"

THE PARADOX

I

WHEN I have gained the Hill
Where beats the clear and rigid light of God
Full on the path by fearless comrades trod;
When I have tuned to theirs my will and word,
And by my prompting voice their ranks are stirred
To hail each height with "Higher! Higher still!"
That luring glow which from the Valley streams
Warns me *I* am not what my spirit seems.

II

But when my life descends
Into the Hollow, where no wild thoughts reach,
And all that lawful yearning can beseech
Sits at my hearth, or in my garden grows;
When I need match no more with noble foes,
Nor share the yoke with unrelenting friends,
That strange veiled star which o'er the Hilltop beams,
Shows me *I* am not what my body dreams!

THE SONG OF A FOOL

I

I HAD a comrade in the days of morning,
High through his youth a fatal wisdom shone.
Still to each task he 'd turn with easy scorning,
Know all too soon, and weary to be gone!
But I, who dream from truth could scarcely sever,
Slow at a fact and laggard at a rule
Drank new delight from some old book for ever —
Thanks be to God, who made me such a fool!

II

I walked with many as the years grew riper,
Who weighed each joy and put it to the test.—
They, ere they danced, must call a skilful piper,
And, ere they drank, a goblet of the best!
But I whose judgment never learnt its paces
Found every country brewing sweet and cool,
And every home-bred muse, beset with graces —
Thanks be to God, who compensates a fool!

III

And now, while life is on itself returning,
While from each window slowly shifts the light,
Loud from the dais, speak the men of learning
Who know the nature of the coming night.
But I who watch the door where daylight narrows,
And irk to find myself so late in school,
Seek truant Hope among the Churchyard barrows!
Thanks be to God, who never cured the fool!

THANKSGIVING

I

SOME thank Thee that they ne'er were so forsaken
In dust of death, in whirling gulfs of shame,
But by one kindred soul their part was taken,
One far-off prayer vibrated with their name!
I thank Thee too — for times no man can number,
When I went down the rayless stairs of Hell,
And to my comrades, at their feast or slumber,
The echoes cried: "All 's well!"

II

Some thank Thee for the stern and splendid vision
Of truth, that never let them shrink or swerve!
Till on their dearest dream they poured derision,
And broke the idols they had sworn to serve!
I thank Thee that, for me, some mystic terror
Still haunts the accustomed shrine, the accustomed way,—
So, though Truth calls me with the mouth of error,
I need not disobey!

III

Some thank Thee for the Voice that sounds unbidden
Above the altar of their sacrifice;
For that great Light wherein they stood unchidden,
And watched, reflected, in each other's eyes.
I too — for whom came never word or token,
Whose prayer into a seeming Void descends,
I praise Thee for the trustful hush unbroken,
The right of perfect friends!

AT A ROMAN SPRING

"Bibe, lava, et tace!"

"DRINK, lave, and hold thy peace!"
So run the nymph's decrees,
Through whose cool finger-tips
The flower of silence slips,
And round whose marble feet,
The flowers of silence meet.

"Here will no god demand
A victim at thy hand;
No blood to stain the stream,
No flute to break the dream;
No prayers to hum like bees,—
Drink, lave, and hold thy peace!"

Springs of that empty lore
Can quench our thirst no more.
Who learns the twilight rede
Day proves him fool indeed! . . .

Yet need we too despise
The grain of truth in lies?

Drink, lave, and hold thy peace!
So some few evils cease!
So, if by lot be thine
Life's marrow and life's wine
The "Praise God!" in thy gate
Will taunt no neighbour's fate.

And, if 't is thine to know
Where the dark rivers flow,
The words (that ne'er could stay
One from th' untried way!)
Shall crown no outlived pain
Lord of thy thoughts again!

And though the market-cross
Must know but gain and loss,
At each cool halting-place
May lurk the thought of grace . . .
"Touch but the springs of Earth,
And thou art sure of mirth!
Drain but the cup to lees,
And who will grudge thee peace?"

A LITANY

I

COME thou at morn before I fight
To cast a glamour on my sight,
Until I think the odds but light
Though men with gods must cope!
But when I wait at set of sun
The news that tarries — "Lost or Won?—"
By all the pangs I did not shun,
Deliver me from hope!

II

If fealty with my tribe I break,
Their scourge let me unshrinking take,
And from the cup they give me, make
Libation to their law!
But when they say my outworn lust
Must wed my forehead to the dust
Or bar my soul from further trust,
Deliver me from awe!

III

If vice has marred my neighbour's fate,
May I deride his word "too late!"
And — to my last sheaf! — re-create
His locust-eaten years!
But when vice, wild with sudden loss,
Its alms in every lap would toss,
Or clamour, dying, from its cross,
Deliver me from tears!

IV

If chance should to my workshop send
A certain silent fleshless friend
Then, while day lasts, Thy legions lend,
And hold him from the stair!
But when the best tool slips away,
And he must idle who would stay —
If once against the Dark I 'd pray,
Deliver me from prayer!

THE HOUSE OF PEACE

A PARABLE

I

YOU shall lodge with us to-night, in our
House of Peace!
We were building it many years, but it stands
at last,
Above the highest ridge of the pasture-leas,
Above the turn of the road, where the thorn
fruits fast,
And the spinney leans from the hill to receive
the blast.
Close Wishing-Gate, nor wait by the Trysting
Trees,
And you shall climb, in time, to the House of
Peace!

II

You shall hear the echoes sing, in the House
of Peace,

A song from room to room, and from stair to stair!
And the smallest shadow hums like a hive of bees,
And the ringing dream with the quietest sleep must pair,
And the morning laughs all night from its scarce-hid lair,
And the silence lifts and drifts into harmonies . . . .
We have sown the ground with sound, in the House of Peace!

III

You shall find the sword, unsheathed, in the House of Peace,
Like a warrior's far-off chant is the ingle's croon!
In the panelled chamber, built for the hours of ease,
We have won our score of fields, between eve and noon!
('T is the weakling's pastime here, and the idler's boon!)

And our silk knights long, and throng from the
hanging frieze . . .
We have chased war's night to light in the
House of Peace.

IV

You shall see the great wheels turn, in the
House of Peace,—
Aye ! turn for evermore, though the stars stood
still !
'T is a Tide that bears life's shell to the endless
seas,
And a Work that knows no check but the
worker's will.
Then we cast our sheaves, content, to death's
grinding-mill,
And the freed dust yearns and turns to a new
increase,
And the new tasks flower each hour, in the
House of Peace !

V

Yet there 's still one thing forbid in our House
of Peace,

Where grief and pain and shame have been
tales to tell,
And strife and wrath and toil have made
melodies! . . .
Would you know what word we shun, for its
darker spell?
You must shun it too, with us, if with us you
dwell!
Aye! Until the last die 's cast, and the last
fears cease,
You must seek *release from peace*, in the House
of Peace!

THE LAST TEST

"If I could put Eternal Power and Purity to a last test, I should ask It to incorporate ruin and uncleanness into Itself, and to make nothing of them."

DEATH, to Hell's Master spoke, not long ago:—
"Well, let us part, since you will have it so!
And I will leave the house where I was born,
Nor taunt you with a fellowship foresworn,—
Yet, ere I pack, grant me my fault to know?"
And Satan, from the ingle, answered low
(While the hearth fires reflected in his eyes
The little low long flame that never dies)—
"Why, since I take the field no more on earth,
'T were cruel to hold you here,—of unlike birth,
Now, in old age, your pleasures are not mine!
I with my Heaven-bred kin would drink the wine
That cannot hearten *you*, and with them speak
Of deeds that bring no colour to *your* cheek—
Done in a far-off unregretted home,
Ere you were born, where you could never come! . . .

Friend! Find some kindlier comrades, ere too late!"
So Death went out, unheeded, from Hell's gate,
Leaving the Deathless to their deathless dreams.
Not far he journeyed, ere he caught the beams
From the World's sun; then, in the World's wide street
(Where the glad tools, like living music beat),
He tells the chance that brings him fugitive,
And prays, for kindred's sake, with kin to live.
"The thirst for babble grows upon the old,
And I have still some secrets left untold,
Some lore of darkness, well for man to know,
As long as man must into darkness go —"
Soft rose the laugh: — "And would you choose to tell
Such lore to us, who know you now so well
We know you to be — *nothing?* Our church-walls
May keep your picture, and your shadow falls
On each man once; but for yourself, good friend,
Our awe of nothingness is at an end!
Have you not heard? — Go hear, at Heaven's gate,
How Heaven itself is stripped of idle state!
Our conquering Race its hoarded years may spend,
And even its thunders to our tribute bend!
Darkness? — Your darkness cannot bless nor ban,—
The quiet unwept for bourne of every man,
While God, with endless morrows, feeds *the Race!*"

Death, from the Race Undying, turned his face
Towards humbled Heaven. 'T was scarce six steps from time
And space; for, now, no stair was left to climb,
No gulf; but only darkness every side
(Patterned with th' countless suns, and faintly pied)
Stooped, like a curtain any touch might draw.
And yet the memory of an ancient awe
Upon that silent threshold made him stand,
Veiling his forehead with a hollowed hand.

"Thou, on the skirts of Thine Eternity,
Seest that which man has grown too wise to see!
Thou know'st what *he* denies — my vain regret,
My memory for what the pure forget. . . .
And, in my darkness hid, the eternal flame
That never yet has screened or pitied shame!

"The dreams I bring about the sick man's bed,
Long ere the word of his release be said,
The foolish thoughts I send, like dung-hill flies,
To foul his feast of noble memories,
The blind remorse that through his being creeps,
Vile in itself as any deed it weeps,—
If these, in truth, be lies, they make a lie
To which the Truth itself has no reply,—

The Hell-born part of Death no boast can cure,
And neither faith nor science will make pure!
Here let me wait with Thee — Thou too art cast
From man's new world! — to wreck him at the last,
And gather curses on his pride to wreak! —"

The curtain trembled, as if hands grown weak
Crushed strength itself to weakness. Shrill and clear
The harps (like visions of a fasting seer
Whose soul goes lighter for the lack of bread!)
Began to rend the air, while Heaven spread
Her splendours, like a twilight. Death saw all,—
The gaps of ruin in the feasting-hall,
The aureoled faces, with their look of care,
Even as the guards in leaguered cities wear —
Then from the midst of such a gloom, as cast
On conquering man would show him hope was past,
(Or as the Unconquered Strength might weave at choice!)
A still small spent imperishable Voice: —
"Enter!" It said. "And wreak them — on My breast!"

. . . . . .

So sank man's last foe, harmless, into rest.

LATER POEMS

A DREAMER'S EPITAPH

THE Light that lit the sunless hill,
And shone above the barren leas,
The Life that moved when leaves were still,
And quickened in the dying trees;
The Power that with my weakness grew
(Mature in my unripened youth!)
Could still the disproved hope renew,
And turn to naught the foolish truth:

The Spirit that so loved my dust
That with the dust it feud could wage,
And all the alien glory thrust
Upon me as a heritage;
The Strength which with my frailties wed,
And for my cause so strangely schemed,
That I, whom it had made and led,
Its maker and its leader seemed:

The days when in each cup of shame
I saw the gleam of hallowed wine,
Nor feared the beast, nor felt the flame,
Because my Comrade was Divine —
These things are my eternal store,
Eternal is my joy for them,
Though He should show His face no more,
And draw from me His garment-hem !

THE EVE OF SAINT GUILLOTINE

THE CONCIERGERIE, A.D. 1793

MONSIEUR THE MARQUIS MAKES HIS WILL

I

MY soul to God!
If He can get it, if He care to thrust
His hand so far into the mire and dust.
Yet, aught that took so readily the hue
Of any sin might take *His* colours too!
Let Him but try its paces with the Blest.
When it a little while that path has trod
'T is odds if He will know it from the rest!

II

My goods I plight
To those I wronged! And now it counts for good
That some of them will spurn the price of blood,
And some already for that price are sold.
For though my poorest manor found me gold;

Though I lacked naught, where other men lacked bread;
Yet, if half stretch the hand that have the right,
'T were rash to promise them a sou a head!

III

Tell her I loved
That what she lost among my wealth should be,
Or — what will blot such loss from memory!
No kinder word? None true! And yet — and yet —
Say I repented that we ever met.
And there 's her warrant — if she will — to weep,
As much as though a loveless soul were moved
To love, and tears could give it better sleep!

IV

In earth I claim
Earth's lot! So when the clover o'er my head
Bows, laughing, to the scythe, 't will serve instead
Of memory — of what matters not! . . . And prayers?
Oh, bring all fashions, new and old-time airs!
And all shall prove, and disprove, equally
The Faith I die in. Nay, I do not name
The Faith I die in, lest it die with me!

V

Here make an end!
The rest is naught, even in the devil's eyes.
A taint of truth that never hindered lies,
An idle shame for shame . . . I keep *those* still?
But, could I give them — like this ring! — at will,
Like this dark curl (wherein the grey 's begun!)
It may be, I should pray you bear them, Friend,
To — one an honest peasant calls *his* son!

THE GHOST'S PATH

I

ONCE, where the pastures glimmered pale,
By dusk, by dawn, she came to me;
When blackthorn whitened down the gale,
When sultry grasses reached the knee . . . .
The wealthy yeoman's only child!
The wealthy yeoman's hireling lad!
And both, by fasting love beguiled,
Could pity him, for all he had!

II

Love's fast is bold as Love's excess
Its further sating to despise.—
'T was youth, with passion passionless
That looked from our entrancèd eyes!
As well mark bud with fruitage fill,
Or summer streamlet rise in spate,
As that Desire, invisible,
That veiled between us, whispered "Wait!"

III

When first she died, I feared to take
The path by any trysting tree!
Feared, for the dreams that burn and shake,
And Memory's ambush, laid for me.
And then, it made my pain complete
That through her haunts no ghost would stir,
That where I most had tracked her feet
I least could wake the thought of her.

IV

The fields beneath the reaper fell,
The plough ground down the dying leaf,
And grief was still intolerable
For lack of the keen edge of grief . . . .
I know not how, nor marked the time
Of change . . . . A neighbouring hill I trod,
And struck a path that seemed to climb
For nothing, but the moon and God.

V

A path that had not known *our* track,
That held no snares for memory,

Nor any voice to summon back
A pure, yet flesh-bound, ecstasy! . . .
None take with me the road unknown,
No earthly comrade seeks my side.—
And yet, I never walk alone
When I walk there, at eventide.

THE LIEGEMAN

THEY talked together, at their feasting board —
Men who had lived for Truth, and loved Her name,
And now no wage at eventide would claim,
Because that service is its own reward.
And some had owned Her, in the fires of shame,
Some at Her feet had cast their golden hoard,
And some, self-stripped of fortune, friend, and fame,
Had burned, for Her, the gods that they adored.

Then unto one, long silent in his place:
"Speak out, and tell us of thy sacrifice,
Thou, whose deep hate of falsehood and disguise
Has made Truth show for thee a special grace."
Slowly he raised his memory-furrowed face:
"I scorned Her not — when She was cloaked in lies!"

THE LATE-COMER

IF Love and I had met at early morn,
Amid the shadows of the primrose-lane,
Or, when broad noon was on the harvest-wain,
Trysted and kissed, beside the ripened corn,
I think I had not made that boon my bane,
Nor, for my love's sake, seen myself forsworn.
Still, with youth's dreams, I might have fed my brain,
Still, through the autumn-years, my burden borne.

Yet, as Love finds me on this twilit marge,
I own the wiser choice of Destiny.
'T is Love's best ends shall be fulfilled in me.
It shall the narrowing world of Age enlarge,
Stand at my side upon the dark-sailed barge,
And tell me when we sight Eternity.

THE TOUCHSTONE

I

AS I go up life's darkened hill,
And through its merry market square,
I need not muse on coming ill
Or foes who might be bribed to spare.
In doubt at the divided ways
My soul and I have never stood —
We fall so straight on evil days,
We could not dread them if we would.

II

As I ride by the treacherous ford,
And o'er the demon-haunted moor,
I care not, though I lack my sword —
Armed or unarmed, my fate is sure.
Each morn I keep the tryst with shame,
Each night with pain and loss I sup,
And still the arch fear calls my name,
And still I pledge him cup for cup.

III

But while for these well-guided feet
  Stars, clear and unpropitious, shine,
I steel my shrinking heart to meet
  An ordeal that may yet be mine . . .
An hour of which I nightly dream,
  When hope, from her dread lair, will wake,
And on despair's untroubled stream
  Deliverance, like a tempest, break.

THE GRANDSON

EIGHT year old! How the time be goin'!
Well! Time do, when it takes a start!
Proper tall, like a man, you 'm showin'—
You *be* man, to the brain and heart!
Maids enough to be peart and pretty,
Fules enough to be wise and witty,—
Strength, and pluck to make life shape fitty,
That 's a man-child's part!

Chances grow, like the seed grows under
Earth's big quilt, i' the furrow's lip;
Chances blaze, like the clouds i' thunder,—
All be good, i' the right man's grip!
Life don't stop much for sobs and shriekin',
Life don't turn for the path you 'm seekin'! . . .
Life 's a mule, in a way o' speakin'!
Well! Us finds the whip!

Love — 't will come, like a cross child's cryin' —
  Just for riddance, you catch to breast! —
Love, they say, be the fire undyin',—
  Well! It be! But it takes a rest!
Ter'ble strong, i' the morning 's ragin'!
Ter'ble kind, when the heart be agein'!
In between be the years o' 'suagin'!
    Then (for men!) work 's best!

Work your will — within rhyme and reason!
  Folks 'ull prate o' God's curbin' rod;
Aye! They 'm big wi' their word i' season,
  Pointin' paths where He 'd have 'ee plod!
'Think He 'll want, for such praise to swell Un?
'Think He 'll stand, for such mice to bell Un? —
More like, do what His best men tell Un! —
    Don't you fret for God!

Work 's His thought, while He keeps 'ee wakin'!
  Days 'ull come, when the light bain't clear.
Some o' life be just life's leave-takin'! . . .
  Darkish? Yes! But a man can steer!
Stand up quiet, as the cup gets leery!
Speak out once, as the Thing creeps near 'ee! . . .
Loud — Aye! Loud for the Fear to hear 'ee! —
    "Men bain't 'feared o' fear!"

THE PRICE

I

YOU know that corner of the wood,
Where, tall and thin, the larches brood!—
Elder and salve o'erlook the hedge,
The copse-wall has a broken ledge,
And yearly there, in season, trail
The ungathered berries of the dwale.

II

Had I the power, I 'd fence it round,
As is the right of holy ground!
'T was there I knew the happiness
By which all other lore shows less;
There met the mad glad ecstasies
Whose tumult is the gate of peace!

III

Now, oft as I that way repass,
I trace their shadows on the grass.

I watch an outlived passion rise
In mine, and in another's eyes.
I raise the long-since broken cup,
And drink the stingless memories up.

IV

And still my calmest clearest mood
Comes, to that corner of the wood.
'T is there I face my soul, and say: —
"We should have learnt — no other way!
Whoe'er would 'scape the burning mist
Should, *once,* the naked fire have kist!"

V

Yet, as my sturdy children grow,
More seldom by that path I go.
When my tall sons claim happiness,
I shall find words, to praise the Less.
While one road else is theirs to plod,
I scarce shall point the road I trod.

. . . . . .

I wish some flaming angel stood
To guard that corner of the wood!

THE SEER

"Churches are best for prayer that have least light."

I

BROTHER ANDREAS in the convent dwelt,
As flesh may dwell among the souls set free.
For there the stately Prior in zeal must melt,
The dullest novice had the eyes that see.
And, when the choir with mystic light would glow,
Or, near as touch, the blessed forms would glide,—
"Seest thou not *now?*" his neighbours whispered low;
"Pray for me! Pray!" his weary voice replied.

II

What time they gathered faggots in the brake,
He guessed what visions led them through the trees,
And, when they cast their nets upon the lake,
What unseen Presence sent them to their knees.

"Yet grieve not, Brother, for thy lack of grace!
God for a little from thee hides His smile!"
Andreas answered, with averted face:—
"I know, indeed, 't is but a little while!"

III

So, to the last, they held him deaf and blind,
Whose soul was sated with the Mystic Flame,
Who sought, ere death, to hide among his kind
The Light from which those vagrant shadows came. . .
God's seer must claim one twilit holiday
That faith may win her spurs and find her wings!
Now sleeps his clay upon the kindred clay;
And all the Brethren dream of common things.

THE TRIUMPH

IN the years that are almost gone,
In the life that the gods approve,
Three things I have never known:
Anger, and Fear, and Love.

Only, in storm-swept space,
I have seen their work with the rest,
The sweat on a lifted face,
The wound on a sinking breast.

And still as I measured the three,
I have sworn with an equal mind,
That they never should make of me
The sport they made of my kind.

But, now as the night comes near,
And each man dreams at his door,
And Anger, and Love, and Fear,
Are things he will meet no more,

I could wish I had met the three,
Betimes, in splendour and strife,
To have mastered them quietly,
And drawn them into my life.

For as long as the years go by,
And the shadows pass and repass,
Whoever comes where I lie,
Will find their track in the grass;

And the sun must with tears be wet,
The knees of the Gods bent low,
Before a soul can forget,
The truths that it would not know!

EARTH'S WEIRD

I

FORCED on herself to turn.
Of neither dusk nor dawn the welcome guest.
And likened most to some poor funeral urn
'Neath the last cypress, by the highway prest.
One cheek towards the way, where hot lights burn;
One, towards the cypress and th' eternal rest.

II

Bound to the wheel of years.
Slave of the sun, — her master's mood to please
Still must she change her garb; now gay, now tears,—
A sorry jest, and played for sorry fees!
Wage of her youth — a seed-plot full of fears.
Prize of her age — the drift of dying trees.

III

Yet we can still divine
The further law which in her bearing shows,

Which girds her, as a pilgrim for a shrine
To journey through the stars — *that* journey's close
Past self, past sun. . . . What guerdon there may shine?
Peace, at the worst. And at the best? . . . *Who knows?*

THE UNDYING CHANCE

I

ROUND this grey inn the light at last is misting,
The evening tide begins to fringe the shore.
'T were late for you and me to make a trysting
Or join our hands once more.
As strangers we should meet — I should not know you,
With no word said we both should quit the spot,
Yet one unerring sign to me would show you —
You 'd be what I am not.

II

If I, by chance, should speak of my repenting
My hidden yearnings, or my secret fears,
Within your eyes there would be no relenting,
No trace of ruth or tears.
'T is so I 'd prove your truth in sterling fashion
Before we broke the bread or touched the wine.
He would but wear your guise who showed compassion
For any wail of mine.

III

My comrade of the long-deserted places,
My childhood's soul — my self of earlier days,
I left you for the lands that fortune graces,
For virtuous, prosperous ways.
You loved the things that bring the soul disaster,
You sought the things that in the darkness dwell,
And had I kept you for my friend and master
I 'd made my bed in Hell.

IV

So there could be with us no thought of pardon,
No word of cheer, or soothing amnesty.
Sight of the man I am could only harden
The man I meant to be. . . .
And calm auspicious night it is that 's falling
Round this last inn beside the shores of life,
And but an evil dream I was recalling,
We could but meet for strife.

V

We will not meet. . . . Yet, could you come unbidden,
Borne as of old upon a tempest's din,
If through the brooding dusk, where storms are hidden,
The storm — and you — could win,

My heart might read the omen of the weather,
My will take arms against propitious fate,
And we with mirth and song set out together
For lands less fortunate.

REALITY

I

WHEN we, the old wise Deities
Who rule by Life's Realities,
Whose fingers crush the Golden Keys
And bar the Ivory Gate,
Would claim a child from cradle-head,
To Truth's best, sternest service bred,
To win from lies the long-misled
And break the spells we hate,

II

Think you, we to his christening bring
The gifts whereof our vassals sing,
The household fire, the marriage ring,
That gentler fates unfold?
No! In his hand we lay the dower
Of stranger gods — a primrose flower,
An elfin-lamp, a glittering shower
Of dead-leaf faëry gold!

III

And through youth's tireless nights and days
We doom him to the dreamer's ways,
To seek (as men seek us) the praise
  Of our worst enemies;
By starlit hill and lamplit town,
We bind him to go up and down,
And rail against the fair renown
  Of Life's Realities.

IV

And when we 've led him, half his years,
Far-seeing, in the blinding tears,
And fearless, in the growing fears
  The long rebellion brings,
In one quiet hour, we grant him sight
Of us, unveiled, in his dream's light. . . .
Did aught but dreams e'er praise aright
  The Sacred Common Things?

COUNSEL

I

THROUGH the wild ways chase the flying Hope!
When and where was it revealed to thee
That thou ne'er shouldst cheat thy horoscope,
Lead her home, and call her Certainty?
But, if she should halt at eventide,
Crying, with flushed cheek and arms out-thrown,—
"Here, afar from all, with me abide!"
Answer not, but turn thee home alone.

II

Build the altar, when the Cloud-Bow gleams!
Leave upon the shore the outworn ark,
Sacrifice the shifting drifting dreams
That beguiled thee on the waters dark.
Yet when surer paths shall lead thee on,
Think who sent thee o'er a pathless space,
Think how like a dream His Token shone —
Heaven's will is not always commonplace.

III

Voice not all the wisdom of thy brain!
Silence may with knowledge sometimes grow.
If thou seest that God made men in vain,
Bite thy lip, nor haste to tell them so.
Yet when thou must quit a long-filled place
Grudge not word, to him that follows thee.
He, at least, should read upon thy face
'T was not vain that all was vanity.

THE EQUINOXES

I

ONCE, as light grew, my eyes saw nothing clear,
Once, to day's tasks, my strength went forth in vain.
Strange wandering dreams the laggard plough would steer,
Strange troubled hopes beset the primrose-lane.
Those seed-time fears but stayed to play their part,
That mirage wan, dissolved, and left me free,
When the sheathed bud spread open to the heart,
When matèd things embraced their destiny.

II

Now, as light sinks, the glamours rise once more,
O'er the reaped lands they weave their silver mist.
Strange voices call, as from a ferry-shore,
Strange phantoms lead, as to a gate of tryst.
This riddle, too, may be made plain to me,
This sorry jest be, by my judgment, shriven,
When the spent leaf no longer clogs the tree,
When, clear through bare boughs, shows the face of Heaven.

OMNIPOTENCE

"Quand même ——!"

IF I am called to fill the spheres of action
Foreseen by early dreams and waiting years,
If to my feet I bring the rebel faction,
With vows, and prayers, and tears,
I will adore the splendid self-reliance,
The matchless strength of that great Power Divine,
Who to the ranks of Hell can send defiance,
By such a hand as mine.

And if my life climbs on to death, un-noted,
If deeds grow ripe upon an unseen tree,
If, in the acclaiming chorus thunder-throated,
Not one note rings for me,
My wondering soul shall praise, with pipe and tabour,
The wealth that had no need my store to taste,
The Eternal Power Who of such love and labour
Creates enough to waste.

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